



Letter on the Calendar Issue



Holy Orthodox Metropolis of Boston

1476 Centre Street
Roslindale, Massachusetts 02131-1417
Tel: 617.323.6379 - Fax: 617.323.3861
Web Site: <http://www.homb.org>



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Patriarchate. It would be interesting to find out if he tried to put the Greek Archdiocese here under the Alexandrian Patriarchate when he became Meletios II of Alexandria. He also had expressed the desire to become Patriarch of Jerusalem.

Endnotes

* The full text of Metropolitan Philaret's statement is as follows: (from *Orthodox Life*, Nov.-Dec. 1965, pp. 4-5) "A crying violation of devoutness at the present time is manifested in the breaking of holy fasts which has become firmly rooted in our society. Vain is the thought of certain people that fasts are essential only for monks and priests; no, they are unconditionally obligatory upon all Orthodox Christians. Blessed Father John of Kronstadt advised not to enter into close relations with those who did not keep the holy fasts, while St. Seraphim of Sarov did not even consider as Orthodox those Christians who ignored fasts. Since we live in America, where by the way, it is so easy and also beneficial for physical health to keep the fasts, this demand of the Holy Church remains unalterable, cannot be waived by anyone and is binding upon all Orthodox Christians."

"Another equally crying violation of piety is represented by the now beloved of Russian society so called charity balls and soirees, especially those organized during hours of Divine Services on the eve of Sundays and Holy Days. St. John of Kronstadt, himself a performer of charity, taught that charity in the form of soirees and balls was not Christian charity, but merely inane entertainment and pandering to passions. We must all unservingly explain to our flock the necessity of the fasts and about the mentioned balls and soirees, so destructive to the salvation of souls."

This letter was originally written in 1968 to Dr. John Johnstone, Jr., of Kirkwood, Mo., by a monk, Father Ephraim now Metropolitan Ephraim, at the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston. It was written in answer to his questions concerning the Old Calendar and its adoption. In a revised form (1975) it appeared as paper no. 2 in the St. Nectarios Educational Series.

Dear Doctor:

I pray that this letter finds you well in the grace and peace of our Savior.

When we first received your letter concerning the new calendar and the manner of its adoption, we were misled by Fr. Meyendorff's statement that the change had taken place as a result of the adoptions of the Vatopedi Synod of 1923. We did not check to see whether in fact such a synod had taken place and we took it for granted that it had. What was new to us was Fr. Meyendorff's contention that the new calendar had once been "adopted" by a synod of the Orthodox Church. When our elder, Fr. Panteleimon, read our original answer to you, however, he informed us that there was no such thing as a Vatopedi Synod of 1923. It was the Synod of Constantinople in 1923. The Synod of Vatopedi was held in 1930—seven years after the change to the new calendar by the Greek Church. This slip on the part of Fr. Meyendorff, however, is an understandable one, since few are those who know just how some churches came to change to the new calendar. Most of the material is in Greek anyway, to begin with.

The question, however, remains: did the Synod of Constantinople of 1923 adopt the new calendar? The answer is no, because it is clear that that Synod made no adoptions whatsoever, but only proposals. In fact, it is even clear that many Churches were even against having the new calendar

placed on the agenda for discussion, and, in fact, many other proposals for the agenda were actually vetoed right on the floor. In connection with this, Vladika Averky of Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, wrote the following concerning the late Metropolitan Anastassy: "... while still an Archbishop and administering the Orthodox Russian communities in and around Constantinople, (Vladika Anastassy) courageously and resolutely opposed the innovations calculated to overthrow the sacred canons, such as the introduction of the new calendar, a married episcopate, twice-married priests, the abolition of fasts, shortening of the divine services, permission for the clergy to wear secular dress, and so on, *proposed* (emphasis mine) by the 'All-Orthodox Congress' in Constantinople, under the presidency of the Ecumenical Patriarch Meletios IV (Metaxakis) of sorry memory. This decisive action on the part of the then Archbishop Anastassy evoked the warm admiration of all lovers of Orthodoxy, beginning with the Patriarch of Antioch who expressed it in a special letter to the President of the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. " ("Orthodox Life", July-August, 1956, p. 6).

The fact that no adoptions were made by the Constantinopolitan Council is also brought out by a telegram which the Patriarch of Alexandria, Photios, sent to the Ecumenical Patriarch when he found out that the Synod of Greece was contemplating a change to the new calendar. I quote: "As a result of your Holiness's telegram, the Sacred Synod that is here with us came together and decided the following: taking into consideration the letters from the Churches of Roumania and Serbia, we abide in these things which have been dogmatized in former Synodal Congresses, and we reject every addition or any change of the calendar before the convocation of an *Ecumenical Synod* (emphasis mine), which alone is capable of discussing this question, concerning which Ecumenical Council we propose a speedy

insisting that as regards the calendar there is nothing to discuss!) Perhaps there is only one solution that by-passes all of this and would make things immensely easier for the Church. This would be if a universal, non-religious calendar were adopted throughout the world. This would, in effect, force the Church back to the old calendar, since the new calendar would no longer be new and the universal calendar would be too radical a change for any Orthodox Christian.

However, as our Fr. Daniel says, if the liturgical unity was broken, it was only because, in fact, the bond of love did not exist even from before. The change to the new calendar was a thoughtless and reckless endeavor that completely ignored the opinions and feelings of the other Churches. Now that the damage has been done, I don't know how it's going to be remedied. In the official Church of Greece, there was a strong movement calling for a return to the old calendar. This movement was speaking in the name of Church Unity and also considered that a return to the old calendar would help to counteract the uniate tendencies that exist in many quarters of that same Church. Here again, the calendar has become a symbol of traditional Orthodoxy (which in actual fact, it is, since those who are most fanatically with the new calendar also happen to be the most "ecumenical" minded).

The fathers here greet you and your family and pray that you are well, as, of course, I do also.

Ephraim monk and my guardian angel

P.S. I just remembered another interesting point. Metaxakis, as Archbishop of Athens, was also instrumental in the break that took place between the Greeks and Russians here in America. As soon as the Greeks formed a separate jurisdiction, Metaxakis placed them under the Synod of Greece. When, later, he became Ecumenical Patriarch, he placed the Greek Church in America under the Ecumenical

kill him instead and cross over to the other side, or lay down your weapons and join him and forget about the other side. "We don't want to fast, it's too hard in America" (In one of his encyclical letters, Metropolitan Philaret stressed how easy it is to keep a fast here in America*—which is so true what with all the fresh, canned and frozen foods available everywhere throughout the whole year, in contrast to the "old country" in days gone by. But there goes weapon number one); "the church services are too long, too monkish, too tiresome—shorten them" (Even though the Apostle says "pray unceasingly." There goes weapon number two); "The Church is a social as well as religious center—let's have picnics, bowling nights, ski trips, hay rides, beach parties." (Blessed are they who mourn.... ", "And take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts become burdened in debauchery and drunkenness and cares for this life... " "We have here no abiding city.. . " "For sufficient is the time past for those to have accomplished the desire of the pagans, walking as they in lasciviousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelings, carousing and unlawful idolatries. " "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.... " "How can we cry for our sins (what sins ?) when we're having such a wonderful time, sponsored by the Church at that?" There goes weapon number three.) Only one weapon remains; our pure and undefiled Faith. But, Doctor, how long will that Faith last if the faithful think as they do in the above instances? One by one we lay down our weapons, because this isn't important and that isn't important, and after all, we're only human.

Nevertheless, there are problems that face the Church when it continues in the old calendar, and there are problems when a change to the new is advocated. But how can anything be solved when you have "fanatical" new calendarists refusing even to discuss the problem? (At Rhodes, Greece kept

convocation. Cairo, January 15 (old calendar), 1924. Patriarch Photios." Patriarch Photios also telegraphed the Patriarchs of Antioch, Jerusalem and Archbishop of Cyprus, and all joined their voices in agreement with him and protested against this arbitrary action of the Synod of Greece. It is clear from his telegram that neither he, nor apparently the other Patriarchs knew of any "adoption" of the new calendar by any previous council. Rather, the exact opposite is true. Significant also is the fact that he proposed that an Ecumenical Council be called to discuss the problem, and not just a "Pan-Orthodox" Council.

ECUMENICAL COUNCILS AND PAN-ORTHODOX COUNCILS

At this point, perhaps a word of explanation is necessary, as regards the differences between an "Ecumenical and a "Pan-Orthodox" Synod. To begin with, the word "ecumenical" comes from the Greek word *oikoumene* which means "inhabited world." However, this term was applied especially to the Roman and later, the Byzantine Empire, since it was assumed by the Romans (and Byzantines) that their empire encompassed the whole civilized world. So the term "Ecumenical" Council meant an imperial council—a council attended by bishops of the whole empire, in contrast to a local, diocesan council. For this reason also, the councils were called by the emperors, who also paid all the expenses involved. The decisions of these councils were universally binding—that is, if, in fact, the decisions were in accord with the faith and practice of the Church, and if they were accepted as truly "Ecumenical" Councils (some councils called themselves by the name "Ecumenical" but were never accepted as such by the Church). In addition, the Councils were always made up of orthodox bishops who came together to combat an evil—either in the person of its proponents, or as expressed in writings—which threatened to

disrupt the traditional faith and practice of the Church.

Therefore, it should be understood that when Patriarch Photios of Alexandria called for an Ecumenical Council, this by no means implied a gathering at which all "Christian" denominations, including Protestants and Roman Catholics, would be represented. He meant precisely that bishops of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church (i.e. the Orthodox Church) should come together to settle an important internal matter, i.e. the calendar issue. Those who would claim that an Ecumenical Council could not take place until all the heretical sects of "Christendom" unite and come together in council in fact deny the very existence of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. When the Arians, Nestorians, Monophysites, etc., separated themselves from the Church, this did not prevent her from continuing to have Ecumenical Councils. In fact, historically, this is the only reason Ecumenical Councils were called: to combat heresy or schism or any other deviation from the faith and practice of the Church.

THE "PAN-ORTHODOX" COUNCILS TO DATE

In contrast to this, the gatherings that have come together thus far under the title "Pan-Orthodox" have had no such purpose, nor, in fact, have they come to any decisions whatsoever. Strictly speaking, they have not even been "Pan-Orthodox" gatherings but only "Pro-Synods," that is, purely preparatory gatherings which are still trying to agree on what should or should not be discussed at the proposed "Pan-Orthodox" synod, when and if it ever takes place. An Ecumenical Council does not have to have anyone else decide for it what it is going to discuss, because the object of its discussion (e. g. heresy) is very likely threatening to tear the Church apart at the seams. There is, therefore, no need (nor time) for the Council to quibble over what the subject of discussion will be. If an Ecumenical Council were to be called

Pentecost and one week after Pentecost is Sunday of All Saints. On the Monday following Sunday of All Saints begins the fast of the Apostles. But with the new calendar, Pascha falls into May at times. This causes the feasts that follow Pascha to be pushed back so far, so as to completely obliterate the fast of the Apostles. In fact, on some years Sunday of All Saints even falls after the feast of the Apostles with the new calendar. According to the new calendar, (ever since the change was made), Pascha has already fallen in May eight times, the last time in 1964, and will do so again in 1975.

THE ABOLISHMENT OF FASTING PERIODS

Now if you dislike fasting, or don't think that it's important enough to concern you, your problem is solved. On the other hand, if you are an Orthodox Christian with passions and lusts and failings and yet still desire to attain to the Heavenly Kingdom, you will not be so willing to surrender this weapon. If you are a Christian like those who lived in Cappadocia in St. Basil's time, you will even seek to extend the length of the fast out of divine and burning love to attain to freedom from the passions and thus, a more pure love for our dearest Savior.

As monks we are very well aware of the inadequacy of mere physical fast—a fast from foods (although in the actual time of the fast my insatiate flesh would incline me to leave out the adjective "mere"), and yet, as monks again, we are very much aware of its definite benefaction in the struggle against the passions that constantly beset us. Even if you get annoyed with someone, at least you don't have the strength to punch him in the nose, and at least that's somewhat of an improvement, so to speak. The question is this: We are Christians, we are living in hostile territory; we want to get to the other side, but an enemy stands between; will we ever get to the other side if we keep disarming ourselves? The enemy wants to kill us if possible, and there are only two solutions;

Irish were "old calendarists".)

LITURGICAL UNITY IS LOST

Yet, even liturgical disunity is not a heresy (but then neither is murder, slander or fornication—yet the Church does not simply brush these off as matters not worthy of consideration), but it still is a very great evil that has crept into the liturgical life of the Church. On February 4, the Church celebrates the memory of the New Martyr, St. Joseph of Aleppo, who was martyred by the Moslems in the year 1686. When the *cadi* (the Moslem judge) told the martyr: "Come now, man, and become a Moslem, so that you may depart from the false faith and come to the true one, so that I may have you by my side, and so that you may become a great ruler," the martyr Joseph replied as follows: "O what a faith you have, so that you try to incite others also to believe in it! Thrice-wretched and ill-fortuned ones that you are! And where did you find this faith which you try now to call true? You wretched ones don't even know when your *ramazan* (month of fast) is, nor when your *bayram* (religious feast) is. You only sit about, waiting to see the moon, so that you can begin your *ramazan*. . . and then again you keep watch to see the moon so that you can have your *bayram*. And if it should chance to be cloudy, some of you have it before and others of you after, and all the nations have you as a joke and they laugh at you," O hapless Orthodox, now even you can't agree amongst yourselves when to fast and when to feast!

As it stands now—if one goes by the present methods which are used by the new calendarists in the celebrating of Pascha—there is only one serious obstacle to making that change to the new calendar: the fast of the Apostles. The canons concerning Pascha state that Pascha can fall only between the 23rd of March and the 25th of April—never in May. This was done in order to provide for the feasts that follow Pascha also, because fifty days after Pascha comes

today, for instance, it would have to deal with the following urgent matters: (1) the lifting of the anathema by Constantinople in 1965 (in view of the fact that the anathema was, like the decisions of the local Constantinopolitan councils of the 14th century, accepted by the whole of the Orthodox Church, and especially in view of the fact that Rome has not yet renounced the heresy—but even added others since then—of the Filioque, which was condemned in the text of the anathema), (2) the uniate practices of several "Orthodox" bishops and priests who have prayed together with heretics or have been present at heretical services, or who have even given the Holy Mysteries to heretics, and (3) the calendar issue. Significant is the fact that Patriarch Photios (together with the other bishops who voiced their protest with him) completely disregarded the "Pan-Orthodox" Synod as an institution, in spite of the fact that one had taken place only one year previously. Significantly, also, Metropolitan Eirenaios of Cassandria (diocese of Greece) referred to this council under Metaxakis as the "anti-Orthodox Council" of 1923.

The real issue, however, is that the calendar was changed by a few in spite of the opposition of the vast majority of the Orthodox, and that it was engineered by men who were not particularly interested in whether or not what they were doing was right, or whether it would scandalize their people. Meletios Metaxakis, who at various times served as Archbishop of Athens, Ecumenical Patriarch, and Patriarch of Alexandria, was a known reformer and Freemason. He became Ecumenical Patriarch "by the grace of Venizelos" (the then Prime Minister of Greece—another reformer) and not "by the grace of God." When Venizelos fell in 1923, the faithful of Constantinople rose up in protest against Metaxakis. Some even jumped the wall of the Patriarchate, found him and gave him a beating, and the man was forced to flee for his life. It was after this that he became Patriarch

of Alexandria in 1926, (again through political means), which incidentally was also the period during which that Patriarchate changed to the new calendar (in Constantinople he was Meletios IV; in Alexandria he became Meletios II, —what next?). Metaxakis was even given a Masonic funeral (Archbishop Athenagoras of London was an eyewitness as his archdeacon). What Metaxakis wanted was an Anglican Church with an eastern tint, and the faithful people in Greece knew it and they distrusted everything he did. While in Athens, he even forbade the chanting of vigil services (!) because he considered them out of date and a source of embarrassment when heterodox—especially Anglicans—visited Athens. The people simply ignored him and continued having vigils secretly.

Besides advocating the new calendar at Constantinople, Metaxakis also wanted a shaven clergy, no rassa, marriage after ordination for both priests and bishops, shorter services, shorter fasts, etc. (Most of these things have been adopted in America—it seems only we here have been faithful to the Synod of Constantinople).

Another indication that nothing—including the new calendar—was adopted at Constantinople is that Archbishop Chrysostom Papadopoulos of Athens had to lie in order to convince the Synod of Greece concerning some anathemas that had been hurled against the new calendar by Jeremias II of Constantinople in 1583, (the Constantinopolitan Councils of 1587 and 1593 also condemned the Gregorian Calendar). Papadopoulos told the Synod that the anathemas were a forgery (some years before his election as Archbishop, Papadopoulos had written an excellent essay concerning the impossibility of changing the church calendar—in it he quoted the anathemas of Jeremias). The essay is found in *Pyrros* Encyclopedia, printed in Athens. In fact, even as Archbishop, just one year before the Church of Greece

many pious pilgrims came from Greece to celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem, not knowing that the Jerusalem Patriarchate follows the old calendar. They arrive in Bethlehem and discover that it is only St. Spyridon's day and that Christmas is two weeks away. They have only arranged to stay for a few days, and few are those who have made the provisions or have the money to wait two weeks. In their dismay, they beg the priests there to chant a few Christmas troparia and, of course, the priests refuse, because not only is it not Christmas according to their reckoning, but they are also in the midst of the fast. The pilgrims return to Greece confused and disheartened since they did not get to celebrate Christmas, even in Bethlehem, and Christmas has already been celebrated in Greece. Therefore, that year they do not celebrate Christmas anywhere. This happens annually there—hence Jerusalem's concern.

And another thing: Metaxakis also officially recognized the "Living Church" in Russia. This gives you another indication about what kind of man he was. The calendar issue was, for him, an insignificant matter in relation to the great plans he had for Orthodoxy. The people knew this too, and anyone who was pious would never think of obeying anything he or his confederates commanded.

However, the question remains, is the new calendar in itself a heresy, a deviation, laying aside all the secret or manifest motives its proponents may have, whether these motives be good or bad? The answer is no. It would be crass heresy for us to say that this calendar is Orthodox and that one is heretical. Even the anathemas which Jeremias II leveled against the new calendar were aimed at stemming the tide of Uniatism which was seeping into the Orthodox communities in Italy and Austria. What is important is liturgical unity, and this is what the Fathers struggled for in centuries past (In his time, St. John Chrysostom was a "new calendarist" and the

that vigil and who are still alive today [1968]. One of them became a nun and received the name Martha. She, incidentally, still follows the old calendar.

In Greece, the real power of the old calendar movement became known during the German occupation. Since the official, new calendar Church no longer had the support of the government in persecuting the old calendarists (many died in prison, from starvation or ill treatment), the old calendarist movement spread like wildfire. In Athens alone they had 500 tiny chapels and churches, with a priest for every one of them! After the war and the return of the government, the persecution was resumed and the movement again slackened. Even so, they have a giant convent of four hundred nuns (in 1946-7 it had six hundred) and a large monastery with about 125-250 monks.

HAS THE CALENDAR ISSUE BEEN SETTLED?

One other point: if the calendar issue was settled once and for all at Constantinople, why was there talk about raising the question at the second Rhodes Conference? In fact, the Church of Greece threatened to boycott the meetings if the question were raised, but the representatives of the Jerusalem Patriarchate insisted that the calendar be placed upon the agenda for discussion, and with good reason. The Jerusalem Patriarchate is especially interested in settling the calendar issue because of its position as a place of pilgrimage. When Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras met Pope Paul in Jerusalem, he went afterwards to Bethlehem to attend the service for Christmas (which, of course, is celebrated there according to the old calendar). In the meantime, the new calendarists were celebrating Epiphany in Constantinople. By the time Athenagoras returned to Istanbul, Epiphany had already been celebrated. In other words, Athenagoras himself, because of this calendar confusion, celebrated two Christmasses but did not celebrate Epiphany that year. Also,

changed to the new calendar, he wrote the following in a related report: "No Orthodox Autocephalous Church can separate itself from the rest and accept the new calendar without becoming schismatic in the eyes of the others." ("Report to the Committee of the Department of Religion" Jan., 16, 1923) Some years later it was established beyond a shadow of a doubt that the anathemas of Jeremias were authentic, and that the Archbishop was, in fact, lying only in order to quiet the troubled consciences of some of the bishops. If the new calendar had in fact been adopted in Constantinople in 1923, Papadopoulos could have used this as a reason for changing. That he did not is clear proof that the Council held by Meletios Metaxakis made no adoptions.

WHY WAS THE CHANGE MADE?

As Archbishop, Papadopoulos was pressured both by Metaxakis and the Greek government. Hence it is clear that the change was made not out of religious motives (since Papadopoulos himself admitted that any church which changed would become schismatic), nor as Fr. Meyendorff says, in order to follow the adoptions of a synod, but it was made at the urging of parties that were known to be indifferent to the Church's needs (such as the Greek government) or known innovators like Metaxakis, and the people resented it and many remained with the ecclesiastical calendar.

At the Council of Vatopedi of 1930, the Churches that are now new calendar had already changed by then—hence even here no claim can be made that the changes were made on the basis of a synodal decision (Incidentally, Vatopedi is the only Monastery on the Holy Mountain which follows the new calendar. It changed because the government of Venizelos promised the Monastery that if it adopted the new calendar, its holdings and possessions would not be confiscated. They were confiscated anyway.) At this council, the representatives

of the Serbian and Polish Churches (the Churches of Russia, Georgia, and Bulgaria were not represented at the Council; Russia and Georgia were not present because, at the time, they were weathering the third wave of persecutions under Stalin, Bulgaria was not present because the "Bulgarian Schism" was still in effect) asked for a separate chapel. When the Greeks insisted that they all celebrate together the Slavs refused, excusing themselves by saying that the language was different, as well as the typicon, and that there would be confusion. The Greeks kept insisting and the Slavs kept refusing, and in fact, to the end of the Council, the two did not concelebrate, and it became clear that the Slavs considered the calendar issue important enough at the time to separate themselves from the Greeks. When they said that their "typicon" was different, the calendar obviously weighed heavily as a part of that difference. At this council also Bishop Nicholas of Ochrid (who later came to America and passed away at St. Tikhon's Monastery) vehemently defended the old calendar. In fact, the Serbian Church even supported the old calendarist movement in Greece by sending them Chrism across the border secretly.

SIGNS FROM GOD ABOUT THE TRADITIONAL CALENDAR

Many signs and wonders from God also took place among the people, so that it might become clear that our Lord Himself did not disdain to be found among the simple and unlettered, but fervent and faithful souls whom Metaxakis and Papadopoulos mocked and derided for becoming agitated over such trivial matters. One of the most astounding signs from God took place during the all-night vigil for the feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, in the year 1925. In the little country chapel of St. John the Theologian at the foot of Mt. Hymettus (which was then miles outside of Athens, but which is now deep within the city limits—so

much has the city grown. The section is called St. John Holargos) over two thousand people had gathered to celebrate the feast according to the old calendar reckoning. When Archbishop Papadopoulos got wind of it, he sent a message to the Minister of Interior Affairs, who in turn sent the police to disperse the crowd and arrest the priest. When the police arrived and saw the size of the crowd, they decided to wait until the morning to arrest the priest. At midnight, just when the procession for Litya was taking place, the people who were standing outside in the court of the little chapel suddenly saw a giant cross forming in the heavens directly above their heads. The Cross, which was lying horizontally, stretched from the little chapel to above the peak of Mt. Hymettus, and was in the form of the Byzantine Cross, with three straight cross-bars. When the people saw it—it was most brilliant and radiant in appearance—they all cried out in fear. The procession and the service came to a stop, and the people fell on their knees weeping and chanting *Kyrie eleison*. The police, also, became so terrified that they literally threw down their weapons and with tears began to pray with the others. For a half hour the Cross remained thus in the sky and then slowly began to raise itself until it finally stood straight up and down, and then it slowly disappeared. The next day, the Athenian newspapers printed a full report with sketches showing how the Cross appeared above the chapel. Such a sign has not taken place since the vision of St. Constantine, and also since the year 346, when the Cross was seen in the heavens stretching from Golgotha to the Mount of Olives, when St. Cyril was bishop of Jerusalem. The reaction to the appearance of this Cross over Mt. Hymettus was characteristic. The pious became more pious; the others simply shrugged their shoulders or tried to explain it away as a phenomenon brought about by some natural causes. It was this way when our Savior worked miracles in the presence of thousands; why should it be different when He worked this miracle? We ourselves know some of the people who were at